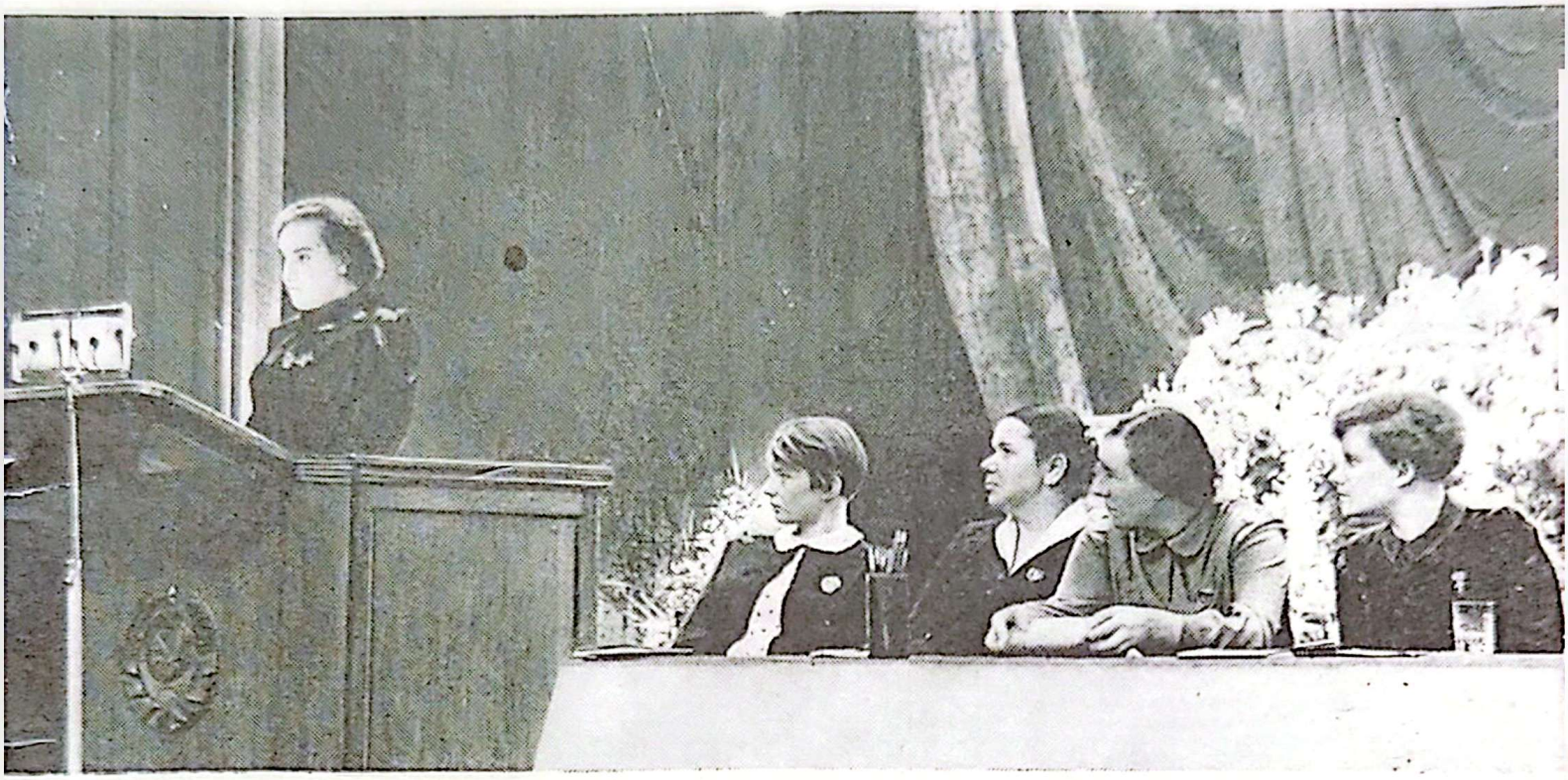
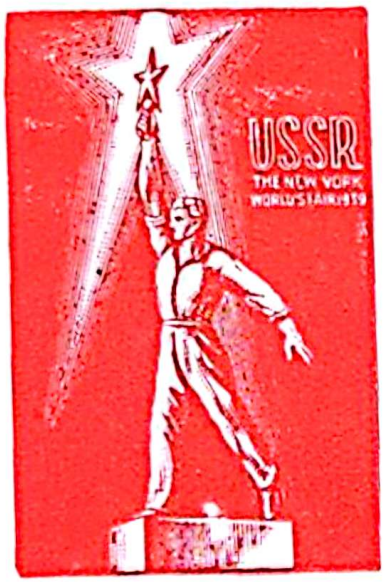


WOMEN in the U.S.S.R.

BY M. PICHUGINA


USSR
THE NEW YORK

ARTIST: HANS KLERING

WOMEN in the U.S.S.R

By P. PICHUGINA

ORDER OF THE RED BANNER OF LABOR
MEMBER OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE U.S.S.R.
CHAIRMAN OF THE TAGANSK DISTRICT SOVIET, MOSCOW

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW 1939

PRINTED IN THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

WOMAN in tsarist Russia had no rights whatever. She was disfranchised. The doors to government and civic activities were closed to her. The humiliating tsarist laws regulating marriage relations made a veritable slave of her. It was considered quite natural that there were more women than men among the illiterates.

The lot of the working class women was particularly joyless. It was the working woman, often a minor, who did the most unskilled and back-breaking work, for which she received a much lower pay than the man. Like the man, she had to work ten and twelve hours a day; her life was

one of semi-starvation, ignorance and want. Frequent periods of unemployment and savage exploitation were factors contributing to the break-up of the working class family.

Nor was the position of the peasant woman, who worked from dawn to dusk without a moment's respite, any better.

As for the women of the numerous smaller nationalities their lot was the most miserable of all. Thus, for instance, the woman of the eastern regions of tsarist Russia was deprived of the most elementary human rights. She was forced to conceal her face with the *parandjhah*, the traditional oriental veil. She was forbidden to sit at table with the men. The birth of a daughter was considered a misfortune, and if several girls were born to a family it was regarded as a disgrace.

The Great October Socialist Revolution emancipated woman, giving her full equal rights with man.

Article 122 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. declares :

"Women in the U.S.S.R. are accorded

Paulina Zhemchuzhina, People' Commissar of the Fish Industry of the U.S.S.R., Member of the Supreme Soviet of the R.S.F.S.R.

equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life.

"The possibility of exercising these rights is ensured to women by granting them an equal right with men to work, payment for work, rest and leisure, social insurance and education, and by state protection of the interests of mother and child, prematernity and maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens."

And Article 137 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. declares:

"Women have the right to elect and be elected on equal terms with men."

Women in the U.S.S.R. are ensured every opportunity of exercising the rights accorded them by law. There are an enormous number of women employed in all branches of the national economy of the Soviet Union today. During the period of the two Five-Year Plans (1928-37), the number of women gainfully employed increased from 3,000,000 to 9,000,000. More-

over, the kind of work done by women has also changed.

In tsarist Russia, according to the 1897 census, 55 per cent of the employed women worked as servants in the homes of big landowners, capitalists, merchants and rich government officials; 25 per cent were farm hands on large landed estates; 4 per cent worked in educational and public health institutions, and 13 per cent worked in industry or the building trades.

In 1936, 39 per cent of all the women employed in the U.S.S.R. were working in large-scale industry or the building trades, 15 per cent were employed in shops, stores, etc., transport and public catering establishments, 20 per cent were doctors or teachers, and only 2 per cent were domestic workers, or servants, to use the terminology of the old days. The remaining 24 per cent worked in various other branches of industry, science or the arts.

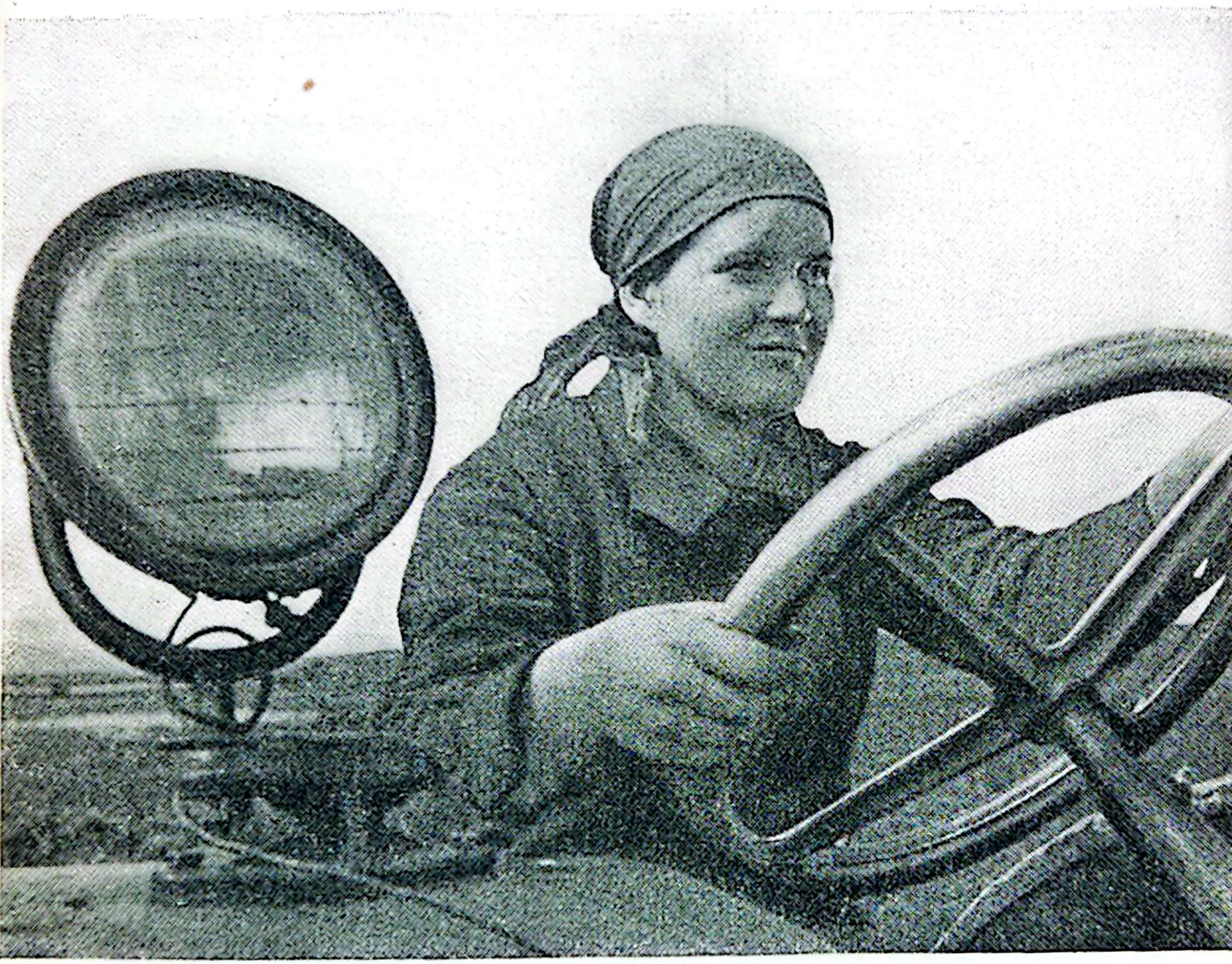
There are huge industrial enterprises in the U.S.S.R., like the Skorokhod Shoe Factory in Leningrad, for example, where 60 per cent of those employed are women.

To help women take an active part in production and in public life in general, the Soviet state has established numerous nurseries and kindergartens, where the mother can leave her child while she is at work.

In 1937 the nurseries and kindergartens of the Soviet Union (exclusive of seasonal nurseries and kindergartens) accommodated 1,800,000 children. The Third Five-Year Plan provides for the accommodation of 4,200,000 children by 1942. Seasonal nurseries and kindergartens established by collective farms during the farming season accommodated approximately 5,700,000 children in 1937.

Public dining rooms and the wide sale of ready-to-serve and ready-to-cook food also relieve the woman of a great share of her housework. There are over 30,000 public catering establishments in the U.S.S.R. In 1938 their turnover amounted to 12,000,000,000 rubles. The planned turnover for 1939 is 13,500,000,000 rubles.

The Soviet working woman, like all working people in the U.S.S.R., has a



Capitalina Shcherbakova, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the R.S.F.S.R. (Chita Region), at the wheel of a tractor on her collective farm

seven-hour working day, and in many branches a six-hour day. The principle of equal pay for equal work, whether performed by women or men, is strictly observed. Like the man, the Soviet woman receives an annual vacation with pay, and if her health requires it, she receives a free vacation in a sanatorium or rest home.

Women are accorded public honor for good work or the attainment of greater proficiency or skill.

A number of professions which were regarded for centuries as being strictly "men's jobs" are now being "captured" by women. Before the Revolution, women were forbidden to hold positions of any importance on the railroads. Now there are over half a million women working on the railroads in the U.S.S.R., many of them occupying key positions. Among these women railroad workers there are 400 station masters, 1,400 assistant station masters, and about 10,000 railroad engineers and technicists.

Any Soviet working woman or collective farmer who has the desire and who

shows the necessary organizational abilities has the opportunity of becoming the manager of any Soviet enterprise.

The U.S.S.R. has its women engineers, physicians, fliers, scientists and executives. There is no branch of industry, agriculture, science or art, and no phase of executive or government work in which women are not employed.

There are more than 100,000 women engineers and technicists employed in large-scale industry or in the building trades in the Soviet Union, whereas in all the other countries of the world combined there are less than 10,000 women engineers.

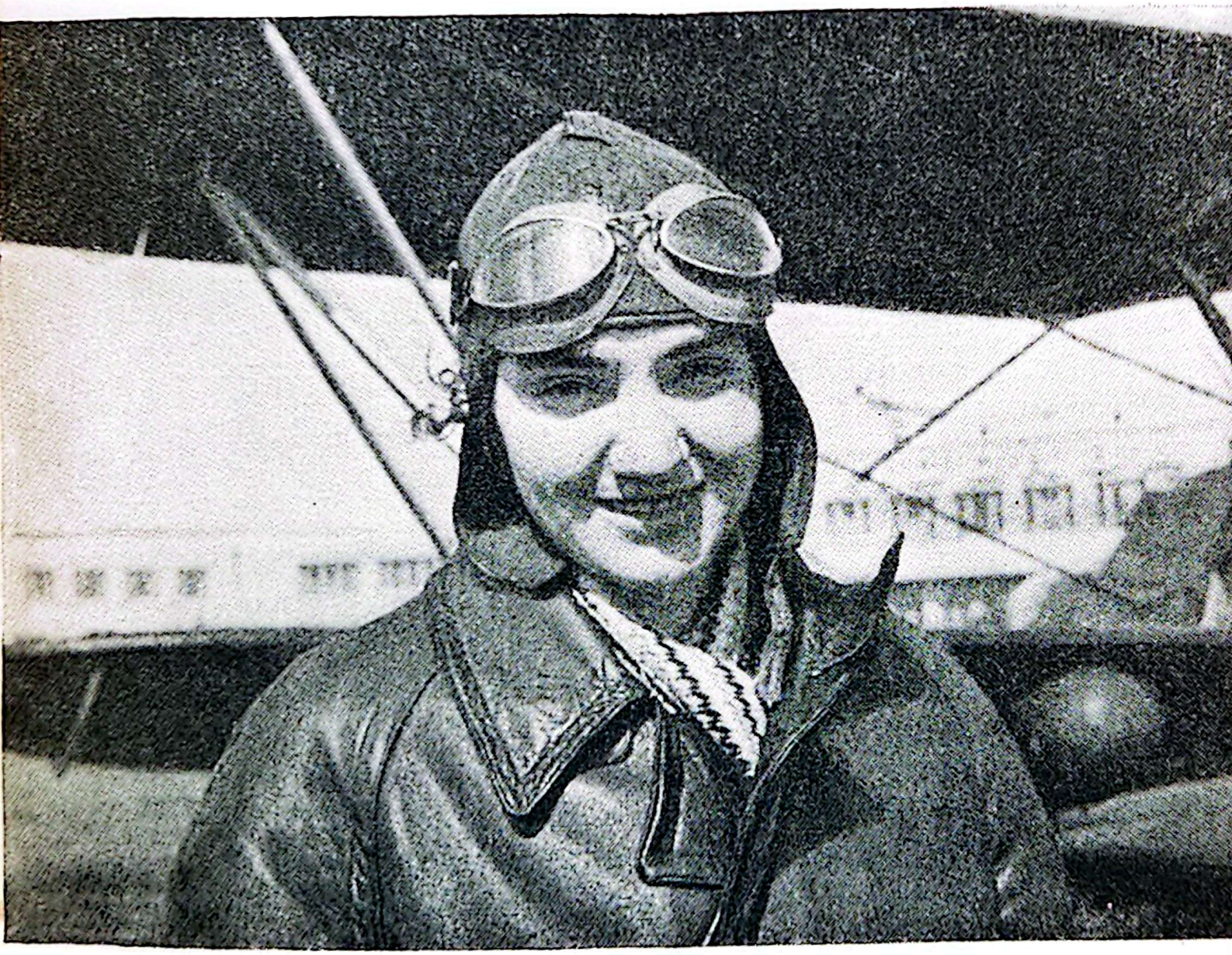
Tsarist Russia had 2,000 women physicians. In the U.S.S.R. there are 132,000 physicians today, over half of whom are women.

There has also been an enormous change in the use of female labor in agriculture.

Approximately 19,000,000 women are now working in the collective and state farm fields. But they are no longer the oppressed and downtrodden peasant wo-

men, "the dumb tools," as Gorky expressed it, of the Russia of old. The collective farm system has completely emancipated woman, in the full sense of the word. The woman of the pre-revolutionary peasant family who worked from sunrise to sunset never knew how much she actually earned. Now every woman collective farmer is able to tell exactly how much she brings into her family. Data for 1936 show that women collective farmers accounted for over 35 per cent of all the work-day units.

A work-day unit is the equivalent of the average amount of work that can be performed in a working day as set for every type of work in accordance with the difficulty of the work, the degree of skill required, the condition of the soil, machinery, etc. For the performance of this standard quota of work, the collective farmer is credited with one work-day unit. If the collective farmer performs more than the specified quota in a working day, he is credited with a correspondingly larger number of work-day units. At the end of the season the income of the collective



Pilot Valentina Grizodubova, Hero of the Soviet Union, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

farm in money and kind is shared out according to the number of work-day units each collective farmer has to his credit.

Formerly it was considered that woman was capable of doing only the simplest kind of work, that she could be trusted with no more complicated tools than the sickle and the hoe. Today there are 1,500,000 tractor drivers and combine operators employed in Soviet agriculture, and among them no few are women.

However, labor legislation in the U.S.S.R. takes account of the physical limitations of women and does not allow them to engage in work that is beyond their strength. Thus, for instance, Soviet law forbids the employment of women and young people below the age of 18 in industries which are considered hazardous to health. From the sixth month of pregnancy expectant mothers, as well as nursing mothers during the first six months of feeding their infants, are strictly barred from work on night shifts.

Besides the regular annual vacation, working women are entitled to a mater-

nity leave of thirty-five days before birth and twenty-eight days after birth, with full pay. Women collective farmers are entitled to one month's maternity leave before giving birth and one month after, during which time they receive their average earnings.

Expectant mothers are transferred to lighter work before they go on their maternity leave, their pay remaining the same.

Nursing mothers are given not less than thirty minutes additional time off to feed their infants, at least every three and a half hours.

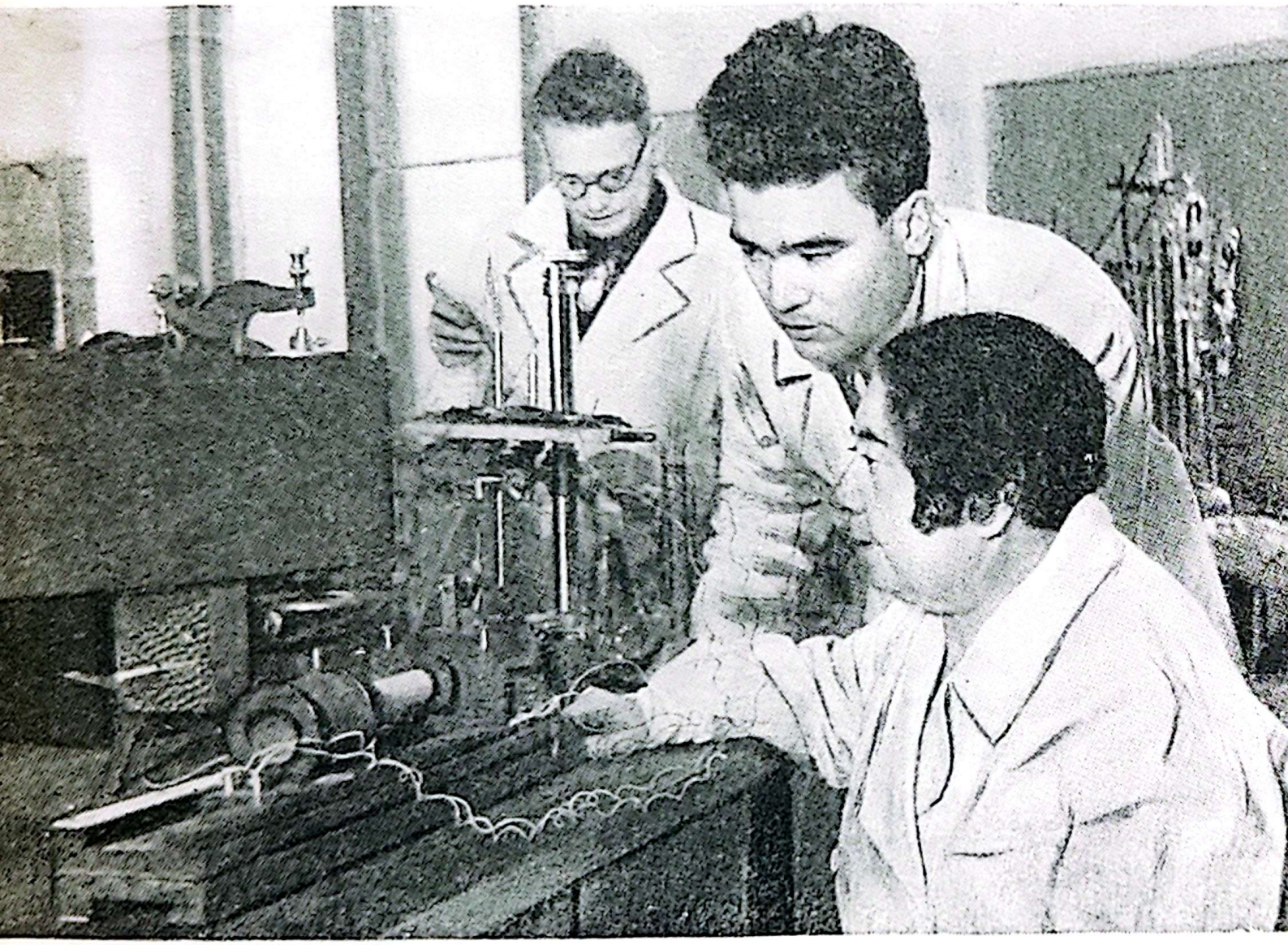
Soviet legislation on marriage and the family protects the interests of mother and child. In the Soviet Union marriage is a voluntary union of free and equal persons. Registration of marriages in the U.S.S.R. is encouraged both in the interests of the state and society as a whole and in order to facilitate the protection of the personal and property rights of the wife and the children. However, unregistered marriages are just as valid as regis-

tered marriages in the eyes of Soviet law. There are no "illegitimate" children in the Soviet Union, all children are accorded the same rights.

A marriage may be dissolved either by mutual agreement of the husband and wife, or at the desire of either one of them. In registering the divorce, the state establishes how much each of the parents must contribute to the support of the children and with whom the children shall live.

In 1936 the Soviet Government called on public opinion to assist in the discussion of a draft decree closely touching the interests and sentiments of all Soviet citizens. The purpose of the decree was to afford still better protection to mother and child, to protect women from the well-known detrimental effects of frequent abortions, to discourage any irresponsible attitude towards paternal obligations, and in general to strengthen the family.

The new decree proposed the prohibition of abortions, with the exception of cases in which the pregnancy endangers the life or health of the woman, or where there



Dr. Lena Stern, Member of the Academy of Sciences, in the physiology laboratory of the Scientific Research Institute of the People's Commissariat of Public Health of the U.S.S.R., Moscow

a danger to the child of inheriting some disease from its parents. In addition the decree proposed a tightening-up of alimony and divorce legislation.

After a broad nation-wide discussion on this draft decree, it was adopted by the government in conformity with the express desire of the population.

Only under Socialism, the system where there is no exploitation and where the constant improvement of the material welfare of all the working people is a law of social development, is it possible to carry on a serious struggle to strengthen the family.

The enactment of this decree was made possible by the complete elimination of unemployment in the U.S.S.R. by the economic independence of women, by the increased material welfare of the entire population, by the fact that the child is secure and can look forward to an assured future.

With the enactment of this law, the Soviet Government assigned enormous sums as benefits to mothers of large families.

Upon the birth of her seventh child the mother receives a benefit of two thousand rubles annually until the child is five years of age, and the same amount on the birth of every subsequent child. Mothers of ten children receive five thousand rubles on the birth of every subsequent child, and three thousand rubles annually through the fifth birthday of the child.

From the day the law prohibiting abortions went into effect (June 27, 1936) to the present time, the state has paid out 2,000,000,000 rubles in benefits to mothers of large families.

The law fully achieved its aim—the strengthening of the family. There has been a sharp decline in the number of divorces. For example, in Moscow in 1936, 16,182 divorces were registered, whereas in 1937 this number declined to 8,961. In 1936, 71,073 children were born in Moscow, whereas in 1937, 135,848 children were born.

The Soviet woman is eager to acquire knowledge, to learn, and the Soviet Government helps her to study in every way.

During the years of Soviet rule, 40,000,000 adults, among whom there are many women, were taught to read and write. And many of these people did not rest content with mere literacy, but continued their studies further in the various schools for adults.

Today women have access to the numerous colleges and universities of the U.S.S.R. Of the 601,000 college and university students in the Soviet Union, 43 per cent are women. The percentage of women students in pedagogical and medical schools is even higher.

The Soviet woman takes great interest in sports and athletics. Over half a million young women have passed athletic tests which entitle them to wear the GTO Badge (Russian initials for "Prepared for Labor and Defense"). Over 100,000 women proudly wear the Voroshilov Badge for marksmanship. Soviet sportswomen hold a number of world records, particularly in parachute jumping and flying.

In tsarist Russia, prostitution was widespread and legalized by the government. Prostitution has been completely wiped

Tatyana Dubok, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., talking things over with one of her constituents (Zhitomir Region, Ukraine)

out in the U.S.S.R. Nor has it been abolished by means of police legislation, but by life itself, by the economic security and complete independence of the Soviet woman.

Participation in the constructive work of the country has given the Soviet woman more than economic independence. It has given the woman equal rights with man to administer the state. There are 189 women among the Members of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. Among the Members of the Supreme Soviets of the Union Republics there are 848 women, and 578 women are Members of the Supreme Soviets of the Autonomous Republics. Over 1,500,000 women actively participate in the work of Village and City Soviets.

Tens of thousands of women in industry have become Stakhanovites, introducing new and better methods of work. Thus, for instance, the textile workers Evdokia and Maria Vinogradova, bold fighters for high labor productivity in their industry, are extremely popular and honored by the whole country.

It was the women collective farmers who won the honor of achieving the highest yields of sugar beets. The Socialist competition for high sugar beet yields was started by Maria Demchenko, a collective farmer. She started out by attaining as much as 50 tons of sugar beets per hectare (2.47 acres). Now there are collective farm women in the Soviet Union who harvest as much as 100 tons of sugar beets per hectare.

In 1936, Pasha Angelina, a collective farm tractor driver, initiated a movement for the best woman tractor driver. Thousands of women tractor drivers and combine operators are now competing for this honor. In 1937, 250 of the best brigades of women tractor drivers plowed an average of 1,838 acres of land per 15 h.p. tractor, whereas the average amount of land plowed per 15 h.p. tractor in the Soviet Union was 1,015 acres.

The Soviet people have every right to pride themselves on women like Valentina Grizodubova, the late Paulina Ossipenko and Marina Raskova, fliers who

displayed such heroism and such superb mastery of the art of flying in their long-distance non-stop flight from Moscow to the Far East. With this flight these Soviet airwomen established a long-distance non-stop flight world record for women.

Among the People's Commissars in the Soviet Union there are twelve women, including Paulina Zhemchuzhina—People's Commissar of the Fish Industry of the U.S.S.R., Qubra Faradzheva—People's Commissar of Public Health of Azerbaijan, and Bakhty Altibayeva—People's Commissar of Light Industry of Turkmenistan. One of the Vice-Chairmen of the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. is a woman—Rosalia Zemlyachka.

There are 12,500 women scientific workers in the U.S.S.R. Recently Dr. Lena Stern, the author of over 300 papers on physiology and biochemistry, was elected to membership in the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.

The author of these lines has herself traversed the path from unskilled worker to Member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

Captain Anna Shchetinina

I entered a kolkhoz (collective farm) in 1929, but after a short time I left for Moscow to join my husband. This was in 1930. Within a year I began to work on the construction of the new ball-bearing plant in Moscow as a common laborer. I studied hard and diligently, and soon became a skilled worker. In 1932, after the plant was completed, I was made foreman in the ball-bearing assembly shop. Within two years the workers of our factory had elected me as their deputy to the Moscow Soviet. I still continued to work in the factory. The Soviet Government decorated me with the Order of the Red Banner of Labor for distinguished service at work.

At the beginning of 1937 the voters of my district, that is, the district where our factory is located, elected me chairman of the District Soviet. Shortly after, the people imposed a further trust on me and elected me Member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. I was nominated simultaneously by four factories. But recently an unskilled working woman, I now take

an active part in administering the country.

The work of chairman of a District Soviet is no easy task. One must be a builder, an architect, an executive and a financier. The Budget of our District Soviet amounts to practically 37,000,000 rubles. The care and laying out of parks and greens, garbage disposal and street cleaning, road building, the local industries, public baths and laundries and a host of other public works all come under the immediate jurisdiction of the District Soviet. In addition to my duties as chairman, I supervise the work of the District Planning Department, the Department of Public Education, under which there are forty-six schools, and the District Board of Health.

Nor am I the only woman in the U.S.S.R. to fill such a post. The Soviet Union has many such women today—and will have still more.

The position of women in the U.S.S.R. is the most convincing argument against the fascist theory of the "inaptitude" of women, of their theory that women are

fit only to raise children and tend to the house.

The great Russian democrat of the past century, N. Chernyshevsky, who did so much for the cause of education in Russia, wrote:

"With what a true, powerful and penetrating mind nature has endowed woman; and this mind remains of no use to society, which spurns it, crushes it, smothers it, although the history of mankind would progress ten times as rapidly if this mind were not spurned and killed, but were exercised."

In the U.S.S.R. the mind and ability of the Soviet woman are exercised in the interests of society and consequently in the interests of the woman herself.